

Amendments to the Claims:

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

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Claims 1-23 (canceled)

Claim 24 (new): A method of producing a protein of interest, comprising:
providing a *Lactococcus lactis* bacterial strain, wherein the *htrA* gene has been mutated
so that said strain does not express a functional HtrA protease;
introducing into said bacterial strain a nucleic acid having a sequence encoding a protein
of interest operably linked to a promoter; and
culturing the bacterial strain under conditions causing expression of the protein from the
nucleic acid;
recovering said protein exported by said strain in the culture medium.

Claim 25 (new): A method according to claim 24, wherein the bacterial strain also does
not express a functional PrtP protease.

Claim 26 (new): A *Lactococcus lactis* bacterial strain, wherein the *htrA* gene has been
mutated so that said strain does not express a functional HtrA protease, and wherein said strain
comprises an expression cassette having a sequence encoding a protein of interest operably
linked to a promoter.

Claim 27 (new): A bacterial strain according to claim 26, wherein the strain also does
not express a functional PrtP protease.

Claim 28 (new): A method of producing a fermented product, comprising:
culturing a bacterial strain according to claim 26 with a fermentation substrate under conditions
suitable to produce a fermented product.